



NORTH CHICAGO COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 187

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Superintendent's 100 Day Report

Introduction

October 8th marked the end of my first 100 days as the Superintendent for North Chicago. During that time, and prior to taking over officially on July 1st, I have had the opportunity to meet with over 100 people to talk about North Chicago's strengths and opportunities for growth. By meeting with teachers, principals, community members, board members, paraprofessionals, parents, clergy, and governmental representatives, I have been able to learn a great deal about North Chicago and understand the current context of the community.

The report below is a summary of the themes that I have found across those many conversations. My purpose in sharing this is to gather feedback on these themes. Are these themes accurate? Have I heard correctly? Is there something missing? My goal is to gain additional feedback by sharing these initial findings and by doing so, further refine them.

A Call for Stability: Throughout the school district, for many years and at all levels of leadership, community members and teachers have experienced tremendous instability due to personnel turnover. Each new leader brings a new focus, new ideas, and significant changes. With these changes, the system has had so many directions over time that there has been, in effect, no direction, and teachers do not feel that they have had time to master skills and/or curriculum.

Academic Gaps: Many of the students in District 187 start school at a significant deficit of academic performance when compared to peers across the country. These deficits are seen across grade levels and schools. For example, Kindergarten mathematics scores put K students at the 5th percentile nationally according to MAP scores in 2017. In reading the average score is 11th percentile nationally.

Academic Growth: With a few notable exceptions in the district, students in D187 are not yet making average levels of growth within each academic year. This problem is especially concerning related to our English Learner population, though it impacts most students in the district. In order to make up for academic deficits, students need to make year after year of above average growth in order to catch up to national peer groups.

Strong Community Partnerships: North Chicago is surrounded by incredibly strong and supportive partnerships with community organizations. The position of the district is unique in this respect and the partnerships represent a significant opportunity and support for growth. The relationships with our community partners are stable and long-term.

Teacher Relationships: Teachers in each school report strong relationships and a high level of regard and respect for colleagues. Teachers regularly cite the other teachers in the school as one of the school's greatest strengths. The annual 5Essentials survey indicates that "teacher-to-teacher trust" has increased over the past several years, but on average scores only 51 out of 100 possible points. Measures of collaborative teacher practices decreased slightly last year, but showed 61 out of 100 points.

Student Behavior and Emotional Well-Being: Across all schools, staff raise concerns about student behavior, and the amount of time and energy put into addressing inappropriate student behavior. The problem appears to be most extreme at the middle school level. Some D187 students confront serious challenges in their homes and communities that negatively impact their emotional well-being, which in turn impacts their academic performance. Consistent and concerted efforts in this area are needed to meet this challenge.

Lack of Concrete Curriculum aligned to Common Core State Standards: In the elementary schools, there is not a single curricular area with strong CCSS aligned curriculum. There is currently no district social studies or science curriculum PreK-5; the math curriculum is pre-CCSS; and the ELA curriculum is pre-CCSS. In the middle school, much of the curriculum being used today has been adopted in the past three years of the SIG grant, much in the past three months, and has not been tried and tested, and teachers have not yet received sufficient training.

Career Pathways and AVID are promising: Career Pathways are one of the most promising developments at the high school that have taken shape over the past several years. The high school graduated its first Health Care Career Pathways (HCCP) students in 2017. HCCP was the first career pathway to take off at the school, and can boast a 100% graduation rate. The other two career pathways started later, but are showing similar early results. AVID, which started this year also holds great promise for increasing students' academic attainment.

Lack of Coherent Instructional Strategies: The school district has introduced and worked on many good instructional initiatives in recent years. Few have reached a point of true institutionalization and integration in the school system. Many instructional strategies have been the "flavor of the week," but there has not been a coherent and concerted effort to implement a framework of instructional practice across all schools over an extended period of time. Teachers have expressed frustration that before one instructional strategy can be mastered, a new one is introduced.

Teacher retention is a serious concern: Teachers and principals across the system have expressed concerns about the loss of many high quality teachers over many years from the school system. The loss of teachers each year presents challenges to instructional coherence, and to the district's training programs. The loss of teachers has been felt most acutely at the middle and high school level in EL and Special Education.

Financial Stability and Threats: The school district's short term health is very strong. We have significant reserves, approximately 36% of our operating budget, and we have a balanced budget this year with funds that can be allocated to long term needs. This was, of course, made possible through a special appropriation from the State. We also have significant potential financial threats on the horizon. The most significant threat is the potential loss of federal Impact Aid. The loss of State special appropriations is another very real threat. With local taxes already at the maximum level allowable by law, there is no room to increase local tax rates.

Now What?

Though I have met with over 100 people, I will continue to gather input from stakeholders. I still have not had enough contact with North Chicago parents. I will look for additional opportunities to talk directly to more parents. I will also talk directly with students. I have created a plan to lead focus groups with students over the next 100 days that will yield increased student voice into this process.

Sharing this report broadly across the district will solicit feedback from community members that will help to clarify and further refine this report. I will use the feedback received on this initial report to focus the findings. This will help lead into our strategic planning process as well by setting priorities for improvement.

Additionally, I hope that this report stimulates conversations across the district about our strengths and areas of need. Responding to this report will help district staff and community members to build a common language about the challenges and priorities for North Chicago.